

Basic Imago theory for Imago Continuing Education

For Members submitting an Application for Imago CEs: This document is to help an Applicant to better understand what the Professional Training & Standards Committee has used historically as its primary criteria for approvals. IRT must be presented in all educational offerings as the overarching, preeminent metatheory that it is within the field of Couples Therapy. Any other modality or model must be presented as both secondary to and supportive of Imago Theory and Practice.

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We are, essentially, energy and our natural state is relaxation and joyfulness. Separation, a dominant myth of our culture, is an illusion.

Imago theory is a shift in a paradigm to one that is profoundly relational. Through that lens, Imago therapists see couples as partners who are yearning for connection even when they do not look like it when they come into our offices. The pattern in relationship is the experience of connection, rupture and disconnection and then repair and reconnection. It is the experience of disconnection and the behavior that is designed to protect against it that gets couples into trouble. Imago calls this experience of disconnection a wound or vulnerability, which replicates in some ways experiences of disconnection with early caretakers. A wound is then most accurately defined in energetic terms as a disturbance in the balanced, neutral, rhythmic pulsation of the energy and our primary (most often unconscious) goal is to restore the original wholeness and aliveness to the core energy, i.e. our core self. All of our behaviors are designed (either consciously and/or unconsciously) to make our existence secure, recover our sense of full aliveness and express our aliveness.

This goal is active in the selection of a primary love partner. We choose a partner who has similar characteristics of caretakers or significant others in our growing up years so that in our primary love relationship we repeat some of the positive and negative emotional experiences of childhood. Given that relationship partners evoke or provoke emotions of those early experiences, those same partners are ideal for bringing healing to each other. This can occur because healing seems to occur in the same emotional environment in which the wounding was experienced. To accomplish this healing partners need a structure to enable them to grow to meet the unmet needs of the other. That growth means that partners will be stretching (including behavior change requests) and growing into their lost and denied selves. This process enables partners to become more fully alive human beings and restore their original state of relaxed joyfulness, connection and personal wholeness.

The Imago structure to facilitate this growth is the Imago Dialogue. This is the core communication skill used to move partners to reconnection through a safe structure that can support couples in dealing with past, present and future issues and emotions. The dialogical process offers partners an opportunity for deepening differentiation with the understanding that while the other is different and separate, experiencing empathy for the other helps make sense of their experience of the world and the relationship.

Imago theory summarizes human experience by describing four journeys:

1. The cosmic journey of the pulsating energy that connects us all, which originates as relaxation and joyfulness.
2. The evolutionary journey that focuses on safety and security, recovery of our sense of full aliveness and the experience of expressing that aliveness.
3. The social journey of growing into lost and denied selves.
4. The psychological journey of the experience of being wounded and healed in relationships and the task of differentiation.